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ABSTRACT

The guide contains suggestions for University of Tennessee, Knoxville foreign teaching assistants to improve their command of spoken English. The first section offers four speech improvement suggestions requiring little or no extra time, including speaking English as much and as often as possible, imitating native speakers, asking for the correct form, and finding out what problems need the most attention. The second section lists relevant resources at the university, including testing and analysis, offerings and services of the audiology and speech and hearing departments, foreign student programs, American students willing to act as conversation partners, tapes and taped programs, trading of tutorial services, and television programs with a lot of conversational content. (MSE)

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FOREWORD

This essay is a list of suggestions on how to improve your command of spoken English. As graduate teaching assistants at UTK, you have already learned a great deal of English and, most likely, your field of study is something far removed from the English language. It may therefore seem insulting to you to receive an essay on how to improve your language. It may also seem bothersome to have what seems to be one more obligation besides your studies forced upon you. As someone who himself has spent more than half his life trying to master another language, I can say that I know this is a difficult and yet fulfilling task.

These suggestions are made in the spirit of trying to increase your fulfillment and decrease the difficulties and frustrations. It is obvious that improved mastery of English will be an asset to you here and now as well as later. There are many resources available to you at UTK for improving your English, and I will try to indicate as many as I can in what follows.

Jeff Mellor

THINGS TO DO IF YOU *'HAVE NO TIME'*

In this section, I make five suggestions that cost little or no extra time. *Anybody* can attempt to work at them, even if he or she has no time for extra tutoring, counseling, or instruction in English.

- The first suggestion sounds simple:

SPEAK ENGLISH EVERYWHERE AND AS OFTEN AS YOU CAN.

This is often difficult to do, especially when you have friends or family who don't use English very much. Also, it is often not easy to be a foreigner in the United States or far away from home, and it may be more comfortable to be with people who know your language, but make every effort you can to find people to speak English with: apartment mates, lab partners, people to tutor, friends from other countries, fellow employees in Food Services, people you meet at the International House and so on.

Each situation has its own special vocabulary: The words you use in K-Mart or cooking dinner are quite different from the words you use in the classroom. The more situations you find to practice your English, the more it will become like that of a native speaker. Many situations like this occur all the time. Seek them out. Put them to good use whenever you can. Just taking time to read the labels on the cans and boxes in the grocery store when you shop can strengthen your command of everyday English.

- The second suggestion sounds just as simple, but is more difficult:

TRY YOUR BEST TO IMITATE NATIVE SPEAKERS.

One reason this is not easy is that many cultures, probably including yours, strongly disapprove of imitating the speech of others, particularly when their speech is different. Somehow, these feelings carry over into the languge learning process and discourage us from closely imitating the exact sounds a native speaker uses. Even in one's native language, a different accent may sound a bit funny. You may have thoughts like:

"It simply does not feel right or proper to really try to speak like an American"
or
"I will feel silly trying to sound like an American, because I know I'm not"
or
"People understand me so why should I try any harder: My speech is good enough."

These feelings strongly inhibit attempts to improve one's English, so overcoming them has great rewards. Think of the feeling of accomplishment and pride you would have if people assumed by your speech that you were born here or moved here as a child. There are so many things to imitate: the sounds of the words, the tone of voice (a tone of voice which in your language means *'anger'* may mean *'interest'* in English), what words

to use and when to use them. Mastering the English of the United States will make you able to advocate your ideas more effectively both inside and outside the classroom. This does not mean that you should totally reject usages typical in other parts of the English-speaking world but learn to fit your speech to your surroundings. There is a saying in English which says in effect *'Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.'* The better you imitate the speech of your surroundings, the more positively people will respond to you.

- The third suggestion takes a bit of courage:

WHEN YOU THINK YOU MIGHT HAVE MADE A MISTAKE, ASK FOR THE CORRECT FORM.

It is no fun to be reminded that we are not perfect, and foreign languages continually call this to our attention, particularly when we find we have made a mistake. Asking for correction of mistakes is also important because native speakers may hesitate to offer help without it. Americans can often be very direct and straightforward in many ways, but many feel inhibited about helping a foreigner find the correct way of saying something. A simple *"How would you have said that?"* or *"What is a better way of saying that?"* can help remove this barrier. Certain Americans will be better at helping you with English than with others. They may be the departmental secretary, a lab technician, or just the person who sits beside you in the ten o'clock class, but they will have a special understanding of what kinds of information you need when you ask a question about English. Discover these people and cherish them, and *do not forget to ask them your questions* when you get a chance.

- The fourth suggestion will help you focus your efforts and save time:

FIND OUT WHAT YOU NEED TO WORK ON MOST.

Just being in an English-speaking environment gives you an enormous advantage in learning English, but this advantage is even greater if you focus your efforts where they are most needed. For perfect English, <u>all</u> aspects of the language, pronunciation, grammar and word choice, even facial gestures, are essential, but for you to get good workable English some of these may need work before the others. Try to find out *when* Americans don't understand what you have said and try to find out *why*. Ask yourself in each problem situation: *"Did I use the right word and pronounce it wrong or did I choose the wrong word?"* Ask the persons you talk with if they can help you identify problem areas. Consult with experts on these questions and try to make improvements in these areas first.

- The final suggestion requires a bit of self-discipline, but will help you use available unused time in a productive way:

TALK TO YOURSELF IN ENGLISH EVERY DAY FOR AT LEAST 15 MINUTES.

I mean that you should talk *silently* to yourself in English for *at least* 15 minutes a day. The more free time you can devote to this, the better.

Choose a topic that will develop the abilities you need most. Your task can take many forms:

Describe in absolutely every detail to yourself what your desk or work table (or any other familiar complex, concrete object) looks like,

or

Give complete, explicit instructions to an imaginary robot on how to prepare a cup of tea (or any other familiar complicated series of actions),

or

Review how you can tutor a person who seems to know absolutely nothing about the subject and make absolutely every mistake in logic,

or

Begin (and continue in absolutely every way) a conversation with an American about some particular subject that you are both interested in.

If you are like me, you will think of things you don't know how to say in English. *That is precisely what you want.* Make note of these items and look them up in a dictionary, ask a friend how to say these things in English, or listen to Americans speaking until you hear the particular words or phrases you need. Remember that: 1) this exercise does not make you leave the library or laboratory (because you can do it while waiting for the elevator to come or the autoclave to heat up), 2) you are speaking English to the most patient listener you know (if you don't know a word you can wait until you can look for it and continue the conversation tomorrow), 3) you are speaking English with the person who always knows when you are unsure of yourself (which gives you freedom to think about the right answer long enough to be correct), and 4) when you find the answers to your questions, you learn from your mistakes, but your mistakes stay private.

SOME RESOURCES AT UTK FOR IMPROVING ONE'S ENGLISH

• The **SPEAK PROGRAM** at the **LEARNING RESEARCH CENTER** offers analysis of test results for GTAs who have taken the SPEAK Test. You may make an appointment with Dr. Jeff Mellor by calling 974-2459 and asking to arrange an appointment with him. He will discuss with you the areas where your speech could be improved and how to do it. If you are going to take the SPEAK Test and have questions about it, you can also make an appointment with Dr. Mellor. The Learning Research Center is at 1819 Andy Holt Avenue, across the street from the Student Health Service.

• The **DEPARTMENT OF AUDIOLOGY & SPEECH PATHOLOGY** offers a number of alternatives for persons who would like to improve their speech and speaking ability. Research indicates that pronunciation is generally the most sensitive indicator of overall comprehensibility, and much of the work in this department focuses on pronunciation in all its aspects: making (and understanding) particular sounds, using English speech rhythm, using English speech melodies. If you have questions on any courses in this department, call Dr. Bernard Silverstein, 974-5451.

Audiology and Speech Pathology 126:
Speech for Foreign Students

This course may be taken for credit or audit. THERE IS VERY LITTLE HOMEWORK FOR THIS COURSE; NO EXAMINATIONS ARE GIVEN. Grading is S/NC (Satisfactory/No Credit) and it may be repeated once. The class size for this course is usually very small so that specific attention can usually be given to the needs of individual class members. Dr. Silverstein teaches the course Fall and Spring semester and works on the following topics:

- pronunciation and phonetics
- hearing differences between certain English sounds
- recording the speech of class participants
- detailed analysis of the sounds they make
- some work on vocabulary, sentence structure development, speech rhythm and melody

Audiology and Speech Pathology 305: ***Speech Science I:***
Phonetics and Acoustics of Speech

This course is required of Linguistics and Audiology and Speech Pathology majors. It gives a detailed treatment of the speech sounds of English, how to produce and transcribe them. Students may register for credit or audit. Dr. Silverstein teaches this class. It is available in the Fall semester.

Individual and Group Instruction

Individual and small group help sessions are available at the Speech Clinic of the Department of Audiology and Speech Pathology. Help in working with specific problems can be offered. Student clinicians will work with interested foreign students in improving their pronunciation. **It is often helpful to bring texts in your field to these sessions because they contain the kind of vocabulary you work with in your classes.** Scheduling is very flexible: Persons desiring assistance fill out a schedule sheet (available at the receptionist's window at the Hearing and Speech Center) indicating how many hours per week they would like to meet. GTAs who have scored low on the SPEAK Test will be given higher priority. This sheet should be submitted to the receptionist in the front hall in the Hearing and Speech Center on Stadium Drive and Yale Avenue, across from Neyland Stadium. There is no charge for this instruction, but attendance is required if you are assigned to a student clinician. The best time to schedule such sessions is **before registration** for the semester because schedule times can fill up rapidly.

• The **DEPARTMENT OF SPEECH COMMUNICATION** offers courses which also may be suited to your needs. One particularly important need that international students have expressed to me is for **practice in**

English conversation. The following course is well suited to meet that need:

Speech 330: Group Communication

This course teaches about the ways in which small groups function in areas such as business or government and much of the class work consists of work in small groups. Each group is given a problem to solve and it must resolve the issue by discussion. Dr. Robert W. Glenn, 974-1923, offers this course. It is available Fall and Spring semester.

• The **DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE** offers several courses of benefit to advanced students of English language and literature. Two of them are:

Theatre 220-221: Acting

These courses are introductions into the practice of stage acting. Much of the work in these courses consists of learning how to deliver dialog expressing a great range of emotion in a convincing manner for an American audience. Part of this work includes attention to culturally specific facial and body gestures appropriate for the spoken message. These courses are available Fall and Spring semesters.

• The **INTERNATIONAL HOUSE** offers **conversation classes** taught by people who volunteer there as conversation partners for foreign students and spouses at UTK. If you are interested in meeting a person in this way, please contact Diane Cudahy at the International House, 1515 Cumberland Avenue, 974-4453. The International House offers a free English class Wednesday evenings from 6 to 8 pm., and students are welcome to come at any time.

• American Students Interested in Language

There are a number of American students interested in language or problems in language learning who would be willing to help foreign students with English conversation. Some are students in Audiology and Speech Pathology, some are learning foreign languages themselves and would be interested in getting to know foreign students who speak the languages they are trying to learn, some are learning how to be teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) and want to learn about heling with problems that will arise later as they begin teaching. If you are interested in getting the names of such students, write out your schedule, name, address, and phone number, print CONVERSATION PARTNERS across the top, and put it in Campus Mail to:

Conversation Partners, LRC
1819 Andy Holt Ave. Zip 4350

• Tapes, Taped Programs

• The **Non-Print section of the Hodges Library** has a large selection of videotapes and audio cassettes which you may listen to or watch whenever you like. There are hundreds of tapes in many fields, probably including your major field and a field in which you are generally interested. Listening to tapes such as these increases your exposure to clear, good models of American public speech. To listen to these tapes, bring your student ID.

Instructional tapes can give you an opportunity to listen carefully to the way American speakers talk about their field. You can develop a better vocabulary for teaching and discussing the material this way.

Tapes on material you already know well can also help you check your listening comprehension in English. If you do not understand absolutely **every** word, you should try to listen to the tape another time until you do understand all the common expressions that arise in discussing your field.

There are also many **feature films** from all over the world in the library. If you watch **American movies,** you hear everyday conversation about a great variety of topics. There is even a group viewing room in the library which you could use with an organization or group of friends to watch a tape and discuss what the people in the film are saying without disturbing other people in the library.

• The **Department of Audiology and Speech Pathology** has a variety of tapes which may be of help and interest to you. There are tapes which inlcude words with English sounds which you may have trouble hearing (discrimination tapes). On other tapes, good model speakers read from books included in the set. With the text and the tape, you can practice attempting to make your pronunciation, speech melody, and rhythm sound like that of the reader. Another set includes a small picture dictionary with readings from this text. Because this set was designed for American children, it stresses everyday objects and could help a foreigner develop everyday conversational vocabulary. These tapes (and books) are available from Audiology and Speech Pathology at any time. To check them out, contact Prof. Bernard Silverstein, Hearing and Speech Center, 974-5451. A small refundable deposit ($2 or $3) is required.

• Television Programs with a Lot of Conversational Content

Many TAs from abroad have told me that they would like to have more practice in conversation to improve their English. This is obviously the best way to improve, but often they have busy schedules and few chances to spend time in conversation. One other good way to improve conversational ability in English is to ***hear*** lots of conversation. I have talked to some students about daytime television programs called "soap operas." They are programs which come on television every weekday with a continuing story and the same characters. The style of speech in them is normal everyday American conversation, and they provide a good way to hear this kind of talk. Soap operas are not great literature, and many Americans who watch

these programs do not admit that they do, but they can help you learn something about the United States and American speech. Here is a list of some soap operas on Knoxville channels.

WATE-TV Channel 6 ABC

12:30	Loving
1:00	All My Children
1:30	All My Children
2:00	One Life to Live
2:30	One Life to Live
3:00	General Hospital
3:30	General Hospital

WBIR-TV Channel 10 CBS

12:30	The Young and the Restless
1:00	The Young and the Restless
1:30	The Bold and the Beautiful
2:00	As the World Turns
2:30	As the World Turns
3:00	Guiding Light
3:30	Guiding Light

WTVK Channel 26 NBC

1:00	Days of Our Lives
1:30	Days of Our Lives
2:00	Another World
2:30	Another World
3:00	Santa Barbara
3:30	Santa Barbara

A number of students gather in International House during the day to watch the soap operas and you might find it convenient to go there and watch them with others. If you have trouble understanding what is going on in these stories, the Knoxville News-Sentinel publishes in the **Showtime** section every Sunday a column called **TV SOAPS** which reviews the happenings of the past week and helps you to check that what you understood is in fact what happened.

The materials in the Special Collection on the Training of Teaching Assistants were developed through the active efforts of numerous educators who first met at the 1986 National Conference on the Institutional Responsibilities and Responses in the Employment and Education of Teaching Assistants held at the Ohio State University. Assisted by more than 80 individuals, the committee chairs listed below were able to establish the collection which will be developed and maintained by the ERIC Clearinghouse for Higher Education. This arrangement will enable faculty members, faculty developers, administrators, TA supervisors, and graduate teaching assistants to have access to TA training materials produced by institutions across the nation.

Task Force on Establishing a National Clearinghouse of Materials Developed for TA Training

Chair: Jody Nyquist, University of Washington

Subcommittees

ERIC Collection Committee-	Chair: Margaret Pryately University of Oklahoma
Council of Graduate Deans Clearinghouse -	Chair: Sheila Caskey Southeast Missouri State University
Exploration of a Review Process -	Chair: Lynda Morton University of Missouri

ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education - Marilyn Shorr

Clearinghouse on ITA Materials - Janet Constantinides

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